

Stabilize your core 1st, then go for strength

What is core training? I have written about it sparingly, preached it to clients and written about it on my Web site (www.t2bb.net).

However, I feel a complete understanding from start to finish has not yet conveyed completely in my articles to the general public. Education is important. You would not go buy a car without reading information about it first.

Gray Cook, a nationally known physical therapist, strength coach and consultant, is one of my mentors. I would like to have his job. He owns his own physical therapy practice and consults for the Indianapolis Colts on strength and conditioning training. I have paraphrased one of his lectures that I think gives a true understanding of core training.

Core training and neuro-stabilization training are popular but are often marketed without adequate explanation. Core training can be just another fad or it can be a science-based method that involves a functional and progressive approach to movement re-education and performance enhancement. To get the most out of a core-training program, it is important to understand the steps neces-

sary to develop it.

First, you must understand that the brain recognizes movement patterns and not simply muscle groups.

Yet many exercise enthusiasts are still stuck in isolation training or muscle group training for improving in their sports. (This does not apply to body building.) If you can grasp that the most basic patterns of human movement and how they build upon each other start in infancy and develop throughout childhood, it becomes clear.

For example, take running and climbing. Running demands that a spine be stable and transfer energy from one leg to the other as well as deal with the counterbalance movement of the arms as they swing. Climbing requires that the spine be mobile, adaptable and dynamic. These are two fundamental movements of the human body yet contrast in their demands of the core.

The core runs on a reflex base. This means that anything you do with the core – like grab groceries from your cart, pick up a child or swing a baseball bat – stabilizes the core. When the core is not functioning properly, something else compensates, typically the lower back and

hamstrings. Problems occur due to significant limitations with respect to flexibility as well as asymmetries between the left and right side of the body and imbalances in muscle groups.

When the core must compensate, the effectiveness of the reflex with its natural sequence and timing is interrupted, the result is a less efficient core that is more susceptible to injury.

Stability comes first. Many assume that doing crunches and increasing the strength of the abdominal muscles will produce a stable core. This is a simplistic approach and fails to demonstrate the difference between stability and strength. Stability is to maintain a stationary or stable spine during activity that demands movements from the legs and arms. Doing more crunches demonstrates greater endurance and greater strength of the core but still does not guarantee that the core will stabilize in a striding or squatting movement. It is important to establish spine stabilization prior to core strengthening.

With most of the population already engaging in core strengthening, I offer this: stability before mobility.

Second, try the exercise described with this photo. It works well for stability with the spine for all activities. Begin with light bands or pulley weight and move away, keeping a tall spine.

As one gets stronger in



Training to be balanced

Augie Hernandez

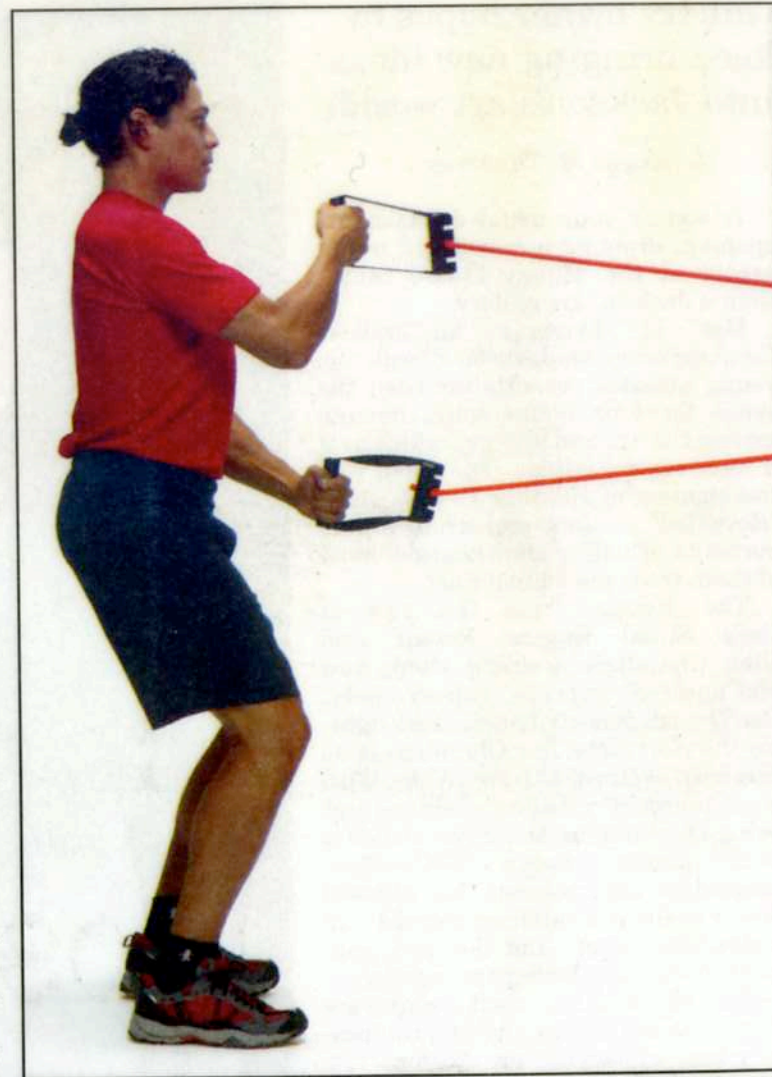


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A spinal hold strengthens lower back muscles. Place a rubber therapy band perpendicular to the body, and pull until there is tension. Hold the pose, then switch hand positions.

stability, integrate core strengthening. This will transcend outside of sports and enhance overall movement.

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